



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana
Wednesday, August 24, 2022
Indiana State Library, History Reference Room

- Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services, Department of Correction
- Dr. Kris Box, Indiana State Health Commissioner, Indiana State Department of Health
- Senator Jean Breaux
- Jay Chaudhary, Director, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, joined via Zoom (non-voting member for this meeting)
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Senator Stacey Donato
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- Kory George, Chief Probation Officer, Wayne County Probation Department
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Zac Jackson, Director, State Budget Agency
- Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Todd Rokita, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Hon. Loretta Rush, Chief Justice of Indiana
- Dr. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Stephaney Knight, Youth Commission Member
- Dejana Rodriguez, Youth Commission Member

1. Welcome

Hon. Loretta Rush called the meeting to order at 10:00 am and welcomed all Commission members and guests.

2. Consent Agenda

Action: The consent agenda, which included the [minutes from the June meeting](#), was moved by Representative Dale DeVon, seconded by Jay Chaudhary, and approved unanimously 15-0.

3. Annual Report

Zach Osowski, the public information officer for the Indiana Prosecuting Attorney's Council and co-chair of the Commission's Communications Committee, introduced himself and explained his role in the Commission's [annual report](#). Zach asked the Commission for their formal approval and opened himself to questions on the [annual report](#).

Action: To approve the [annual report](#), was moved by Bernice Corley, seconded, and approved unanimously 15-0.

4. **Strategic Priority: Juvenile Justice and Cross System Youth**

**Presentation by Steve Balko, IDOE, & Nancy Wever, IOCS, Juvenile violence subcommittee
Evidence-based programs for reducing and preventing violence**

The presentation can be found on slides 5-21 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Steve Balko introduced himself and the topic to the Commission then invited Nancy Wever to discuss the data. Nancy began by sharing the first goal of the task force, which was to outline and define what serious and violent delinquent behavior means. This can be found on slide 6 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Nancy shared that the data presented included youth in the juvenile justice system but also youth who may have been processed in the adult system. Nancy emphasized caution when making conclusions from the data, since many counties were missing from the collection. Nancy showed a chart that mapped the racial and ethnic demographics of the data. The map showed the most cases were from Black, non-Hispanic youth. Next, Nancy showed a timeline that outlined the number of acts committed by year from 2011 to 2020. Age and gender were categorized next, with the vast majority being 16- and 17-year-old males. Nancy also explained the heat map that showed the differences in number by type of offense, with armed robbery being the most frequent, dangerous possession of a firearm as second, and carrying a handgun without a license as third. Steve explained that they considered 20 prevention programs and concluded with three, hoping to encompass different resources and issues in different counties. He outlined the Cure Violence model, which can be found on slide 14 of the [meeting Powerpoint](#). Steve summarized the model's main points, including behavior and norm changes, intermediate outcomes, and final outcomes. The next model, Credible Messenger Mentoring for Justice Involved Youth, can be found on slide 16 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Steve explained that this model aims to provide mentors from similar backgrounds for youth who seem to gain no benefit from traditional services. Steve next described Project Build, which can be found on slide 18 of the meeting PowerPoint. This 10-week program showed promising results for court and gang involved youth regarding academic achievement, recidivism, and more.

Discussion: Representative DeVon asked a clarifying question about legislative changes around gun licensing. Nancy shared that legislation around the age required to obtain a license to carry a firearm changed over time and is reflected in the data. Chief Justice Rush reiterated that gaps may exist from the sample included. Nancy also mentioned that cases that have not been fully processed were not included in the sample. Terry Stigdon asked Nancy if the data being incomplete would affect the recommendations. Nancy clarified that the data included is enough to signify what areas interventions are needed in. Terry Stigdon asked Steve who would be tasked with implementing the models, and Steve said it could be anyone, including local government, public-private partnerships, but not the state, as violence prevention is a local issue. Dejana Rodriguez asked if current non-profits were already using these models, to which Steve answered that they could be. Jay Chaudhary emphasized the importance of peer support in preventative frameworks. Senator Breaux asked if the models included wraparound services, Steve shared that he did not know, but that local services would hopefully connect with each other. Dr. Katie Jenner emphasized the importance of collaborating with the structures that are already working locally. Chris Naylor asked about victim support, to which Steve clarified that these models are community violence prevention models. Dejana asked about how to better follow up with those involved with violence, and Steve mentioned some hospital models that work well, but are different from the frameworks he is describing. Chris Naylor addressed Julie Whitman to see how mobile crisis units could be relevant to this topic. Chief Justice Rush reiterated Terry Stigdon's earlier question about who is to implement these programs, to which Steve mentioned that private-public partnerships are most likely, but there is no limit as to who. Bernice Corley asked who would fund these programs, and Steve said that the goal was to provide programs that the Commission deemed relevant to our communities, not directly asking for funding. Dr. Katie Jenner asked if federal funding flows through state agencies or directly to communities, to which Chief Justice Rush answered that it varies. Jay Chaudhary emphasized the importance of the timing of these models with the Gun Safety Bill and the sustainability issue involved in funding anything. Dr. Katie Jenner asked if the Commission would keep in mind the importance of clear measurables. Kory George asked if the recommendation could include language promoting community collaboration. Chief Justice Rush also encouraged each member to consider funding opportunities for these programs. Dejana clarified that these

programs would be put on the Commission’s website for locals to view and decide which program might fit their system best. Chief Justice Rush considered the wording of the action, debating whether the Commission is recommending, endorsing, or acknowledging these programs. She and the Commission decided on using the word support.

Action: To support [three violence prevention program models](#), was moved by Chief Justice Rush and seconded by Representative Summers, and approved unanimously 18-0.

5. Strategic Priority: Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Chief Justice Rush: Mental Health Summit Update

Chief Justice Rush passed a handout to the members of the Commission and explained what the Summit will entail. She shared the Summit’s agenda and goals, which focused on addressing the high rates of mental health issues among those who make up the justice system. She also shared the goal of creating clarity when crises occur. She shared her excitement and opened to questions.

Discussion:

Julie Whitman mentioned that she would be sharing the Summit’s registration information with the Commission members.

6. Executive Director Updates

Julie Whitman

Implementation Updates

Julie Whitman outlined the goal of implementation updates, which is to look at previous topics addressed by the Commission and see what is happening with them now. She shared the progress on HEA 1359 (Youth Justice Oversight Committee), which included the formation of the different workgroups who have each met once. She shared the meeting schedule of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee. She also mentioned three former Commission products and wanted to inform the members about their use and implementation. The first, a [Resource guide on reducing the use of seclusion and restraint](#) in child-care settings, is being used in residential facilities and could be used in other settings. The IDOE [comprehensive positive school discipline guide](#) and [information sharing guide](#) exist to help schools and guide collaborative efforts for children and families. Julie asked the Commission to promote the use of former products to those who they would be useful to.

Evaluation and Strategic Plan

Julie Whitman reminded the Commission members of the ongoing evaluation that will be used to get stakeholder feedback and shape the next strategic plan.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush asked Julie about the timeline of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee, to which Julie responded that the final products are due June 30, 2023. Representative Summers referenced the length of the evaluation survey, to which Julie said there is an option for the research team to complete the survey via phone call.

7. Discussion: Commission Members Report Out on Current Priorities

Chief Justice Rush shared that the Commission would go around the circle and ask each member of any priorities they wish to share. Dejana Rodriguez asked a general question to the Commission about infant mortality rates. Dr. Box shared some brief, general statistics that showed some improvements over time on this issue and mentioned she could outline specific programs to the Commission later if requested. Senator Breaux asked a general question about pregnancy resources in schools given the recent legislation regarding abortions. Dr. Jenner mentioned that specific programs and approaches are local. Dr. Box reiterated that individual schools

have the authority to implement the existing resources or not. Bernice Corley mentioned the Youth Risk Behavior Survey could be a helpful tool in guiding addressing this issue. DeJuna Rodriguez reminded the Commission that not every teenager in foster care has access to the same resources. Representative DeVon informed the members that he has been working on creating a documentary with youth talking about unplanned pregnancy. Dr. Box responded by mentioning that this resource most likely already exists. Continuing with the updates, Dr. Dan Rusyniak mentioned that FSSA has been focusing on pediatric mental health lately. Chris Blessinger shared her excitement for the work of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee. Representative DeVon mentioned he has been working to get federal funding for kinship care, and preparing for the Interim Committee on Child Services, which is tasked with reviewing the DCS and IDOH child fatality reports. Chief Justice Rush said that many of the Supreme Court's forward-facing initiatives involve children and families. She also mentioned Indianalegalhelp.org, which provides free legal resources and she encouraged the legislators to share that resource with their constituents. Terry Stigdon mentioned that DCS got their prevention plan approved by the Federal Children's Bureau, and shared that she wanted to go more upstream, and they were able to get the Healthy Families program approved for federal 4-E funding to help more families. Chief Justice Rush asked about getting a DCS service standard for Family Recovery Courts as a way to help fund that intervention, which keeps children safely with their parents while they go through treatment and recovery. Representative Summers shared general concern with the recent abortion legislation and its potential impact on the system. She asked members to think of preventative efforts now before the system is overwhelmed. She also invited Dr. Box to give a presentation on infant and maternal mortality. Justin Forkner echoed excitement for the Youth Justice Oversight Committee. He mentioned that it might be helpful for the Commission to hear some of the outcomes of the Court's Upstream initiative, a project currently underway in Tippecanoe and LaPorte counties. Zachary Jackson asked for member input on budgetary issues. Dr. Box shared excitement about data findings looking to improve health issues in schools, including improving the nurse-to-student ratio, proving emergency medicines in schools, as well as different screenings for children. Chris Naylor also reiterated the importance of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee and shared upcoming training involving children and guns with new legislative changes, as well as drug dealing resulting in death cases. IPAC is also gearing up for its winter conference to train new prosecutors. Kory George shared priorities of focusing on counties who do not participate in JDAI to ensure benefit from the Youth Justice Oversight Committee work and how to better retain staff. Dr. Jenner mentioned the Youth Justice Oversight Committee's capacity to look at literacy rate data, outlining some previous statistics that showed low literacy rates in third graders and the correlation between low literacy and behavior problems, which eventually lead to justice system involvement. Chief Justice Rush endorsed the idea of combining juvenile court data with IDOE data, as well as DCS with IDOE to look at how vulnerable youth are doing educationally. Senator Breaux highlighted the problem of absenteeism for young children K-3 and its impact on literacy. DeJuna Rodriguez mentioned that parents may not be equipped to help teach their children.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, October 19, 2022, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana State Library, History Reference Room

The meeting adjourned at 11:46 a.m.